

Statement. Nordic Foreign Ministers' meeting, Nordic Council session in Helsinki 31 October 2012

Nordic foreign and security policy cooperation is in a period of dynamic development, which is reflected in the implementation of several key recommendations in the Stoltenberg Report, including the Nordic declaration of solidarity. We are constantly seeing new examples of closer cooperation in practice.

We intend to meet the challenges facing the Nordic countries and the world as a whole through continued close cooperation. This includes cooperation with other countries within and outside Europe, and cooperation within the UN and with NATO and EU. Our countries are part of different constellations, and across these, we are making important contributions to the EU and NATO that are strengthening security both within the Nordic region and in Europe as a whole.

Defence and security policy cooperation

The Nordic countries are engaged in practical defence and security policy cooperation, including joint exercises, purchases of military equipment, capacity building in East Africa and participation in the ISAF operation in Afghanistan. We have decided to consider more closely joint Nordic contributions to UN operations and Nordic solutions for military air transport and follow up of veterans.

One of the proposals in the Stoltenberg Report is that Sweden and Finland should take part in surveillance of Iceland. A separate statement on this matter is attached.

Syria and Lebanon

The Nordic foreign ministers are appalled by the continued bloodshed in Syria despite the promised ceasefire during Eid Al-Adha. Although Brahimi's attempt to bring about a ceasefire has failed, his valiant efforts to resolve this brutal conflict are still enjoying strong support. We are concerned about the possibility that the conflict could spread into the rest of the region. Efforts to achieve agreement between the permanent members of the Security Council on a political transition process must continue. The Nordic countries urge the international community to provide further humanitarian aid for the region, particularly as winter is fast approaching. The barbarity of the Assad regime is obvious. It cannot be condemned too strongly. We urge all parties to respect the law of war.

The ministers urge all Lebanese leaders to stand together against the forces that are seeking to undermine stability in the country.

The Palestinian Territory/Israel

The Nordic foreign ministers are deeply concerned about the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territory. These settlements are in violation of international law, and are the greatest obstacle to a two-state solution. At the meeting, the ministers have discussed possible responses to the continued expansion of the Israeli settlements, including the implementation of existing legislation on products from these areas.

The Nordic countries are very concerned about negative economic trends in the Palestinian Territory. The huge effort made by the Palestinians to build up a viable state that could function under a negotiated two-state solution is now in jeopardy.

The Nordic countries welcome the progress that has been made under President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad towards the establishment of a viable state within a negotiated two-state solution. With a view to strengthening our contact with the Palestinian Authority, the Nordic countries have agreed on the upgrading of Palestinian representation in the Nordic capitals.

Belarus

In the view of the Nordic foreign ministers, the human rights situation in Belarus has worsened and it is important to maintain and if necessary tighten the sanctions regime. Support for democratic forces and civil society in Belarus and for the exile university EHU is a crucial part of efforts to promote democratic development in Belarus. The EHU will need economic support from the Nordic and other countries.

Ukraine

It is disappointing that the election in Ukraine was not conducted in accordance with internationally accepted standards. We will continue to support the democratic forces in Ukraine and urge the authorities to make the crucial reforms that are needed in the areas of human rights and the rule of law.

Cyber security

Cyber threats are a rapidly growing challenge to our security. The Nordic countries are responding to these threats by establishing a Nordic classified communication network, which will make us more resilient to cyber attacks in the future.

Cooperation between Nordic embassies

The Nordic countries are seeking to increase cooperation between their foreign services. This is another concrete expression of our closer Nordic cooperation. Together we are stronger. In November, a joint embassy office will open in Yangon, Myanmar. The Nordic foreign ministers have decided to develop similar solutions in Islamabad, Hanoi and Dhaka.

In the long term, we are seeking to develop joint missions in additional key cities in Europe and North America.

The Nordic countries intend to establish a joint embassy complex in Reykjavik. This complex will be developed in close consultation with the host country, Iceland. See the attached statement on this matter.

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